MY QUEEN

A WEEKLY JOURNAL FOR YOUNG WOMEN

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MARION MARLOWE'S SKILL

OR

A WEEK AS A PRIVATE DETECTIVE

BY GRACE SHIRLEY

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CHAPTER I.

HATCHING A PLOT.

"This biz is agoin' ter the dogs, Liz. We've got ter tink up a new game. See if yer can't fetch up somethin' that'll bring in a few more plunks. I'm sick o' all this scrimpin' an' palaverin'."

"Wat's the matter wid yer doin' a bit o' the tinkin' yerself, then? Yer can't expect of me ter do all the schemin' an' connivin'! I've done my share! It ain't none o' my fault that the expenses are so heavy. You'd best git out an' hock some o' them dimon's if yer be so scrimped o' money."

"Not on yer life! Them dimon's is my stock in trade! It's er cold day in er cold wurrld win Terence O'Connell hocks his shiners!"

"What was bought wid ther money that his sister made fer him. Oh, well, there's no use a talkin', I suppose."

The speakers, brother and sister, were seated in a dingy room which was used both as kitchen and dining-room, as well as parlor.

There was a door opening out of it which led to a still dingier bedroom and a sort of closet on the other side showed a cot-bed covered with a shabby blanket.

Terence O'Connell and his sister lived in this squalid place; yet when they sallied forth from their miserable abode the woman was always handsomely dressed and the man was fairly blazing with diamonds.

This altercation about money was no new thing in their lives, for it was a frequent cause of dissension between them.

How they made their money not one of their neighbors knew, nor would they have been much the wiser had they overheard the conversation between the pair.

"Liz" O'Connell had been an orphan for many years now, and at present she was tak-

ing care of these two wretched rooms for her brother, and, as will be seen, she was his partner in their so-called "business."

The girl was not over nineteen years of age, and nature had intended her to be very pretty, but through an endowment of vice and misery from her parents, her once fair face had become permanently disfigured by lines of viciousness.

She tried to disguise these lines by means of paint and powder, but even the thick coat of rouge which she always applied could not cover the sallowness and haggardness of her features.

"I've bin thinkin' o' a scheme," she said to her brother as she moved about wearily trying to tidy up the miserable place. "I've got 'er plan in my head that may work an' it may not, leastways ther's no harm in tellin' it to yer, Terry."

"I should say not!" said her loud-voiced brother, pomposly. "Begorra ther' ain't no harm in sayin' anythin' ter Terence O'Connell. He's a wise man, he is, an' knows enough ter kape his own counsel!"

"Yes, an' anything else he can lay his hands onto," said his sister, sarcastically. "But here's my plan, Terry. Yer can tell me what yer think o' it."

The girl plumped herself down on a chair almost in the middle of the room, and in an instant the whole demeanor of her brother changed.

Putting his finger to his lips he tip-toed over to the door leading into the hall. He opened it softly and threw a cautious glance around, then closed and locked it and drawing a handkerchief from his pocket deliberately plugged up the keyhole.

"Now we be safe from ther brat yer can fire away!" he said, softly. "'Twon't do ter take chances wid ther lame kid, Liz. He's allus a prvin', an' he might make us a lot er trouble."

The girl's eyes flashed and an angry scowl darkened her face.

"He'd best not try it, thin," she said, in a sort of hiss. "Why, if he did I'd break ivery bone in his miserable body."

"Go on wid yer scheme," said her brother, commandingly, as he too dropped into a chair, his huge body sprawling clumsily.

"Well here 'tis," began the woman, lowering her voice cautiously. "Ther's a girl that I knows on that's got er few t'ousand dollars an' she's er dead-easy mark—a reg'lar country greenhorn. Now my plan is ter work up a hard-luck tale o' some kind, er woman in distress or er kid in distress or some such a thing, an' by gainin' her sympathies we can get ther money."

"What makes yer think so?" asked her brother, sharply.

"It's bin done befor'," was the woman's quick answer. "She's bin helpin' this one an' that one ever since she's bin in ther town. She's one o' them softies that lets everybody work grafts on her."

"Be gob, just ther kind we's lookin' fer," was her brother's comment. "But go on, Liz. I'm a waitin' fer the pertic'lers."

"She's just erbout my years—not quite so old," continued the woman, "an' she's havin' her voice trained fer ther grand opery by Madame Leopold. Lives at ther Rosedale Hotel. Oh, she's mighty handy, I'm a-thinkin'."

She gave a sharp, shrill laugh as she winked at her brother.

"Who knows her, Liz?" he asked, with a sudden light crossing his coarse features.

"Bess Ross, o' course," was the woman's answer. "An' she's put me on, you bet. She says she's dead-easy. She's mightily stuck up an' high-toned in her ways, Bess says, but she's as soft-hearted as ther is ever made in spite o' her hifalutin' feelin's."

"Them's ther kind as comes down ther

han'somest when they comes down," said the man, shrewdly. "But are youse dead sure, Liz, about ther money?"

"How could she be a-livin' there an' doin' nothin' if she didn't have it?" asked the girl; "an' what's more, how's she payin' that Madame Leopold if she hain't got money?"

"That's so," was the answer, with a broad grin. "She's got it sure, but p'raps it's all tied up some'ers. P'raps she only has one o' them incomes."

"As if Bess hadn't a-found out all that!" said the girl, impatiently. "And ain't I a-bin takin' lessons in deviltry from my brother long eno' ter be smarter than that! Yer must be daffy ter think me such a graft!"

"Oh, come off, Liz! I was only a kiddin'," said the fellow, meekly. "You an' Bess are smarter'n steel-traps, old gal. Ther ain't none ter beat yer, but tell me just what yer knows about ther money."

"Well, she got it this way," said the woman, loftily. "She won a reword that was offered fer that there artist man's wife who was missin' fer so long. Youse remember her, Terry. Her name was a high-soundin' one—Leonie St. Clair—an' ther reward was paid this girl in clean, cold cash. Ther was three on 'em got it an' it was fifteen t'ousand an' she ain't spent a third o' her'n."

"An' youse think you can work her?" asked the man, delightedly.

"Sure," said the woman, with a toss of her head. "I've got ther scheme, but o' course youse got ter help me."

She leaned a little nearer to him and began talking rapidly, and as she finished outlining her fiendish plan the man was chuckling with satisfaction.

"Be dad, you're a daisy, Liz! There ain't no flies on yer! But what did yer say ther young un's name was? I don't want ter make no mistakes in my part o' ther biz. I'm er most perticular man, I am, in these kind er transactions."

"Her name is Marion Marlowe," said the woman, distinctly. "She comes from Hickorytown in Connecticut, an' she's as pretty as er peach. Ther joke o' ther thing is she's got er rich feller, an' 'twouldn't s'prise me much if that was ther reason why Bess Ross is takin' such an interes' in her!"

"Bess 'ud best look out," said the man, sourly. "She engaged ter me. She'd best not fool me!"

"Oh, ther won't be no trouble in trappin' ther little fool," said his sister, quickly, in an effort to change the subject. "She'd break her neck ter get where ther was trouble, Bess says, an' she'd give up her last cent ter try an' relieve it."

Yet with such an admission as this on her lips, the woman did not falter. To her a generous nature was a thing to be despised—a kind heart was merely something to be imposed upon and broken.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOCTOR'S PROPOSITION.

The parlor of the Hotel Rosedale was particularly well adapted for love scenes, and early one mild October evening two young people seated themselves in one of its inviting alcoves.

One of these young people was Dr. Reginald Brookes, a young physician with a frank, honest face who was quite as good and honorable as he was handsome. The other was Miss Marion Marlowe, a beautiful country girl of seventeen, who was known among her friends as the bravest, noblest girl in creation.

Miss Marlowe was living at the Rosedale under the chaperonage of her music-teacher, Madame Leopold, for she had a magnificent voice, and, as Liz O'Connell had said, she was having it trained for grand opera.

Marion Marlowe had spent only one winter in the city, but her short stay had been full

of thrilling adventures, and it was a few months since she had won the reward of five thousand dollars offered for finding and restoring a beautiful young bride to her parents.

Dr. Brookes had aided her materially in this, and he too had won the same amount, but as he was already wealthy the acquisition of this small sum did not mean as much to him as it did to his companion.

As they sat in the dim light of the alcove they were both thinking of this same occurrence.

"Yes," Marion was saying, in a low, sweet voice, "I have managed to spend fully two-thirds of my money," and then she added, laughing, "I find vocal lessons and hotels very expensive, doctor."

"If you could only arrange to live with your sister Dollie," suggested the doctor, gently, "I am almost sure you would be happier, Marion."

Dollie Marlowe had married and was living in Harlem, and as the doctor mentioned her name his companion smiled sweetly.

"No doubt I would be happier," she said, quickly, "but, dear me, just think of poor Dollie and Ralph! Why their honeymoon would be spoiled if I were with them."

"I don't think so," replied the doctor, with an ardent glance at the sweet face. "I am inclined to think, Marion, that no honeymoon would be complete without you."

The words were said gayly, but there was a ring of eagerness in the tone, and as the young girl detected it her face flushed slightly.

"Dollie and Ralph wouldn't think so, I am sure," he said, laughing, "although, of course, they have both assured me over and over that they would. They are very sweet about asking me to live with them in their cozy flat, but I think I am wiser in leaving them alone in their glory."

"But what will you do when your money is gone?" asked the doctor, anxiously.

"Work," was the brave answer; "and do you know I almost long for it! Why, I feel as if I was of no use in the world at all while I sit here day after day spending all my efforts on my music!"

The young physician glanced at her quickly in admiration, but there was a look in his eyes that showed that he was disappointed.

"I shall find something to do, I am sure," went on the young girl, cheerily; "and it will be such a pleasure to feel that I am really earning my own living. Why, do you know, I have never felt that I had a real right to this money."

"Yet you almost risked your life!" cried the doctor, quickly. "Well, if you did not earn that money, Marion, I'd like to know what you call it!"

"But it was done in a day, and someway I have never been able to fully realize it. Now, when I can work day after day and draw my salary every week, I shall feel like a business woman," she said, laughing merrily.

The doctor moved his chair near her own, and as the young girl glanced at him quickly she saw that his face had suddenly grown very serious.

"Marion, won't you let me help you?" he asked, very softly. "You know, little girl, you have a magnificent voice. It would be a pity for anything to stand in the way of its cultivation. Now, you know, Marion, I have money—plenty of it, almost—that I don't know how to use. Won't you take some of it, Marion; it would make me so happy?"

As she listened the young girl's eyes filled with tears. She appreciated fully the deep sincerity of his offer.

"Oh, doctor! you are so kind, so generous!" she cried, impulsively; "but indeed I cannot accept your offer! I must work out my own career. Don't you see that I must? It

is my nature, I guess, to be self-sufficient and independent!"

"But aren't you just a little bit too much so, Marion?" whispered the doctor, eagerly. "Are you wise to defer what should be attended to at once, and all because of a wrong idea of independence?"

Marion shook her head, while a sad look crept into her eyes.

"I couldn't do it," she began, when the young man interrupted her.

"But if my mother gave it to you—would you accept it then, Marion? She would be delighted to do it. I have only to ask her."

The fair girl laughed gayly. He could not deceive her. She knew perfectly well that it would still be his money.

"Please don't urge me, Doctor," she said, very gently and sweetly. "I understand and appreciate your kindness thoroughly, but I cannot take it, so please, please don't ask me!"

Dr. Brookes drew a long sigh. It was evident that he was bitterly disappointed.

It seemed such a pity, he mused, that this young girl's musical education should not be completed when he had money and to spare; besides he loved the girl dearly. As he was about to speak, some one came into the parlor.

It was a young girl of about Marion's age, perhaps a year or two older, and in an instant both occupants of the alcove recognized her.

Marion looked up quickly as the woman walked up to them.

"Good-evening, Miss Ross," she said.

There was no answer from Miss Ross—only a deep scowl crossed her features. With a glance of hatred toward them both, she turned on her heel and left the room.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE CALLER.

As the woman left the room, Marion looked inquiringly at the doctor, who shrugged his shoulders as if he were annoyed and disgusted.

"Do you know her?" she asked in a very low whisper.

"I did—she is Bessie Ross," was the doctor's answer. "I don't know her now, though, and I confess I don't wish to."

"She is one of Madame Leopold's pupils," said Marion, still staring at him. "But why did she glare at me so? I have never harmed her."

The doctor laughed, but still looked rather disgusted.

"Jealous, perhaps," he said, almost gravely. "Miss Ross honored me with her affections at one time, but I'm afraid I did not appreciate them altogether. You see, she was my mother's seamstress, and under the circumstances——"

"I see," said Marion, with an amused twinkle in her eyes. "Poor girl, then she must be suffering from unrequited affection."

"Oh, I guess not!" said the doctor, quickly. "I guess she got over it all right. Anyway, she has been in love since, if I am not greatly mistaken."

Marion could see that the subject was not a pleasant one with him, so, with her usual tact, she began talking of other matters.

A little later the physician took his leave.

It was still early in the evening, but he had a call to make on a patient.

As Marion tripped back to the elevator, she passed two of the bellboys, who stood in the office door.

"Gee whiz! but she is the prettiest girl in New York," said Bob Dillon, the porter, as she came through the hall. "She's got a style about her that's out o' sight! Many's the rich

woman that would give her bottom dollar to look like her."

"There never was and there never will be another Marion Marlowe," said the clerk, grinning. "I haven't heard anything but her praises since she came to the Rosedale! First I hear about her beautiful voice from Madame Leopold, her teacher; then along comes a countryman, who tells me how she helped him save his daughter from the slums; then up bobs a detective, who says she's the next to the best rogue-catcher in the world. Oh, I tell you, she's a wonder, and no mistake; for the strangest thing about it is that she deserves all they say about her."

"Well, she's as pretty as a picture," said Dillon, enthusiastically. "Why, her eyes are like stars, and her lips like cherries! And as for hair—why, I saw hers hanging down in a braid one morning, and I'll take my oath she had to hold it up to keep it from dragging!"

"Oh, come off! You've got it bad!" cried one of the bellboys. "She's all right, you bet, if she can rattle a porter!"

There was a general scamper for the office as a stranger came in. He was a shabbily-dressed man, his face almost covered by a beard that was both unkempt and unnatural. As he drew a soiled card from his pocket and laid it on one of the silver salvers on the desk, he turned meekly to the clerk and said:

"Send that up, if you please, to Miss Marion Marlowe."

There was a second's hesitation in the shrewd clerk's manner, then, without a word, he handed the salver to a boy and sent him up to the third floor to Miss Marlowe.

Marion was sitting in her room reading over a letter from home, and there were tears on her dark lashes as she turned the pages.

It had been many months now since she had seen the old farm, and, oh! what a knowledge of the world and the people in it she had gained!

Her heart ached sometimes under its burden of information.

She was dreaming of the meadows and hills as she read, and her mother's homely words, with the old-fashioned expressions, were weaving a spell about her that rendered her almost oblivious to her surroundings.

"Dear, dear mother," she sighed. "How I do long to see you! But never mind, it will not be long now! As soon as my quarter with Madame Leopold is finished I shall run up to the country for a day at least—for with all its quiet and its humdrum days, I can never, never quite forget it!"

She folded the letter and put it in a fresh envelope, intending to mail it at once to her sister Dollie, who, like herself, was almost pining for the country.

"It is a pity mother's letters are so rare," she said aloud, "but, dear old mother, she never wrote very well. In her day an education was not considered necessary. A woman's only ambition in life was to get a good husband!"

She smiled a little at the idea, yet it seemed dreadful to her not to want an education. As she rose from her writing table she caught sight of herself in the mirror. There was a stray lock of her chestnut hair falling too low over her brow, and taking a step toward the glass she tucked it up carefully.

A beautiful reflection stared back at her from the mirror, for the young girl was quite as pretty as her friends all thought her.

As she surveyed herself, she was startled by a tap on the door. Opening it hastily, she was confronted by Dick, the brightest bellboy in the Rosedale, who handed her a card.

She took it, and then frowned slightly as she read the name upon it.

"Mr. Terence O'Connell," she repeated it aloud.

"I don't know him, but I'll go down," she said, good naturedly.

She turned back to the glass again and arranged another curl; then fastened a rose at her throat in place of an ornament.

"I guess I'll do," she said, with a half smile.

Two minutes later she was in the parlor confronting Mr. O'Connell.

CHAPTER IV.

A TREACHEROUS BEGGAR.

What was Marion's surprise as she entered the dimly-lighted parlor to see a shabbily-dressed man, who was a perfect stranger to her, standing hat in hand and bowing to her servilely.

"Is this Miss Marion Marlowe?" he asked, in a low, hoarse voice. "I begs yer parding, miss, but I couldn't help a comin'. 'Tis on an errant o' mercy I am; so I hopes ye'll not be after mindin'."

Marion stared at him wonderingly. She had merely nodded in reply, but the man went on without heeding her silence.

"Sure, 'tis of yer own swate self that wese have all bin hearin', miss—how yese are that noble an' generous, an' allus a doin' good ter others. 'Tain't fer mesilf that I comes—ther Holy Saints forbid it! But fer ther lame lad, Danny. Here's a note from him, miss."

Marion took the piece of crumpled paper that the man held out, but instead of reading it she stared at him fixedly.

"How did you hear of me, sir?" she asked, with her eyes on his face.

There was not a sign of embarrassment in his voice as he answered her.

"Faith, wasn't it all in ther papers, miss?" he asked, in a louder tone of voice. "Wasn't all yer noble deeds told in glowin' letters, miss, and wasn't it Terence O'Connell himself who read every wurrd of it?"

There was a ring of sincerity in his voice that baffled Marion, but she did not take her eyes from his face when she asked the next question.

"What is Danny to you? Is he your boy?" she questioned, more gently. "And what do you want me to do for him, Mr. O'Connell?"

The man shrugged his shoulders with an involuntary motion, but in an instant he had recovered, and his voice grew bolder than ever.

"Sure, it's nothin' I asks, lady, nothin' at all. Ther lad lives in ther house where I'm livin,' that's all, an' as he's a poor little cripple, I takes notice o' him, lady."

There was a tremor in his voice now, and he drew his rough sleeve across his eyes.

In an instant the young girl grew softer in her manner.

"And did he ask you to bring me this letter?" she said, kindly. "If that is it, I am obliged to you, although I do not even know Danny."

A remarkably keen look sprang into the Irishman's eyes. The young girl was nibbling at his bait, and he speedily grew more reckless.

"Faith, that's wot he did, miss, just that same, as I was a comin' out," he said, quickly. "And, sure, how could I refuse ther poor little cripple?"

"You couldn't, of course," she said, as she opened the note. "It was kind of you, Mr. O'Connell, to do an errand for the boy."

The young girl read her note, which was really a miserable scrawl, and but a repetition of what the man had told her.

The cripple wrote that he was an orphan and absolutely alone. He was obliged to sell papers to earn his living, but now he had been taken ill and did not have a penny. He ended by telling her that he had read of her kindness to others, and he begged her to come to him and give him a lift, for if she did not he would be sent to the city's home for incurables. The tears sprang to Marion's eyes as she read the words.

Somehow, she felt that they were truthful,

in spite of the man's manner, and her gentle heart always ached for a child who was afflicted.

"Tell Danny I will come to him as soon as I can," she said, quickly. "I see he has given me his address in this letter."

"Thank yer, miss," said the man, and started to go, but as he got to the door he paused and looked back pleadingly.

"He's pretty bad, miss," he said, in almost a whisper. "Would it be askin' too much o' yer, miss, fer ter come to-morrer?"

Marion thought a minute before she replied. There was a gleam in the man's eye, but she did not read it correctly.

"I shall certainly try to," she said, very earnestly; "but if I can't you will certainly take care of him, won't you, Mr. O'Connell?"

The man lowered his head and drew his hat on awkwardly.

"Faith, an' 'tis mesilf, Terence O'Connell, who is good ter ther poor, lady," he said, with a sigh; "but there's divil a crust in ther house ther night. It's poor pickin' fer me own, let alone ther cripple."

Marion's ready hand went at once to her pocket.

"Here, take this dollar," she said, softly, "and I will either send or bring more to-morrow."

The man slipped the dollar into his pocket with a word of pious thanks, but as he shuffled off down the hall he was chuckling secretly. "Dead easy graft! A reg'lar mark!" he muttered to himself. "Once let me get her over ter ther joint, an' ther boodle is jest as good as salted."

It was the young girl's impulse to go to Danny at once, but she had given her word to her teacher that she would await her at the hotel, in order to look over a lot of new music.

It seemed a trivial thing to keep her from an errand of mercy, but Marion respected her word in trifles as well as in great things, and then again she had not been asked to come until the morrow.

As she passed the office door she glanced toward the desk. The clerk, Mr. Harvey, was too busy for her to disturb him.

"Well, I've had an experience!" she said, as she met one of her acquaintances in the hall. "I've actually been taken for a philanthropist, Miss Merton, or a home missionary, or what is more singular, perhaps, a wealthy woman! A man who looks like a Bowery tough has implored my aid, not for himself, I am glad to say, but for a poor little cripple."

"That is the result of having a kind heart," said Miss Merton, pleasantly. She was a maiden lady with a sweet, amiable disposition.

"I thought he must have made a mistake," said the beautiful girl, smiling, "but he had my name all right. It was Marion Marlowe."

"There's only one Marion Marlowe," said Miss Merton, laughing. "Oh, I'm sure you don't know just how famous you are, dearie."

Marion blushed, for she could not help knowing what was meant. Several times already her name had been in the papers, but in each instance it was as the heroine of some thrilling adventure, so the publicity, while it was unpleasant, was far from disgraceful. Of course, there were times when all this praise flattered her a little, for she was only a girl, and youth loves praise, particularly when it is honestly merited.

She turned the conversation as soon as she could, for as they reached the elevator Marion found Bessie Ross waiting for it, and for some reason or other she had always dreaded this young woman.

CHAPTER V.

MARION IS OFFERED WORK.

"I shall go to see the child, of course; but it is so unpleasant to have callers that one

doesn't know," she said, gayly, as she stepped into the elevator after her friend had entered. "Still, if I can do any good to anyone, of course I don't mind. I am willing to play 'My Lady Bountiful' to the limit of my ability!"

"Oh, but don't let them impose on you!" said Miss Merton, smiling. "There are so many beggars in the world who are utterly unworthy. But won't you come in a minute, dear?" she added as they reached the second floor.

Marion accepted the invitation with alacrity and stepped out at once. Miss Ross was still in the car on her way up to Madame Leopold's room, and Marion felt sure that if she went on up the young woman would speak to her.

As soon as they got into Miss Merton's room Marion confessed her feelings to that lady. She knew her sufficiently well to know that she could trust her.

"Dear me, how singular it is that you should have such intuitions!" said her hostess, with some perturbation. "Really, my dear, your instincts are wonderfully accurate! If I thought you needed it, I should certainly warn you against her: but there, I abhor such petty gossip!"

"But if you know anything against her!" began Marion, quickly.

The lady placed her finger on her lip, and then smiled gravely.

"It is better that I should not tell. I have warned you," she said, softly. "If I am wronging the girl, I am certainly not injuring her!"

"You would never wrong nor injure anyone, I'm sure, dear Miss Merton," said Marion, quickly. "But I thank you for your warning, and I shall profit by it."

"I am afraid the poor girl will never be a singer," said Miss Merton, after a minute. "She has been coming to Madame Leopold for a year or more now. I fancy she has suffered through her ambition and sometimes I pity her."

Marion had it on her lips to tell Miss Merton what Dr. Brookes had said; then she, too, became discreet and said nothing about it.

Miss Merton began chatting about other things, and a half hour passed very swiftly and pleasantly.

As usual, Miss Merton had drifted around to talking about her brother. He was her idol, and she had often mentioned his name to Marion.

"You are like Tom," she said now. "He is awfully soft-hearted! Why, he helps everybody and everybody imposes on him. You must meet him, for he's my big, splendid brother!"

"Oh, I would be so glad to!" was Marion's laughing answer. "You have spoken of him so often, I just delight in hearing of such fine characters, Miss Merton."

"Well, Tom has about all the graces that were in the family," was the lady's laughing reply. "So perhaps I may be pardoned for worshipping him, but, poor chap, he is so good that it worries me sometimes. I often wonder if such a nature is not just the opposite of a blessing."

"A little caution and forethought are excellent things to have," said Marion, slowly. "I did not used to think so—I was just a creature of impulse. But now, as you say, I am beginning to wonder a little. I see that I am liable to become the prey of all the 'sharpers' in the city. But, oh, there is always that awful chance of being mistaken—of refusing to aid when the cause is really worthy!"

"Justice before anything else—both to yourself and others," said Miss Merton, firmly. Then all of a sudden she thought of something that made her open her eyes and stare hard at Marion.

"What is it?" asked the fair girl, as she saw the change in her face.

"My dear, do you wish to do some work?" asked her hostess, quickly. "I have just thought of a position that I know you could fill! You are so wise and sensible, and so just to others. My brother would simply be delighted if I could prevail upon you to do it!"

Marion looked at her eagerly. She was evidently very much in earnest.

"I am sure I shall be delighted, Miss Merton," she began, and then stopped suddenly. It had occurred to her that she could not take any position just at present, for she was devoting several hours a day to her singing lessons.

Miss Merton comprehended the situation at once.

"It will not interfere with your music at all," she said, rapidly. "You can do it in the hours that you would devote to exercise. It is only something that will occupy you but two or three hours daily."

"Do tell me what it is!" said Marion, eagerly, "for if that is all the time it requires, I shall be very glad to undertake it."

"Two dollars a day," whispered Miss Merton, with a business-like nod.

"That's a lot," laughed Marion, "and I shall be glad to earn it. Just at present I am drawing on my bank account very heavily."

Miss Merton drew her chair a little nearer; then she leaned forward and whispered in the girl's ear for a moment. As Marion listened her cheeks flushed and her eyes began to sparkle. Long before the last sentence was whispered she was trembling with expectation.

"I'll try it!" she exclaimed, quickly, as Miss Merton finished. "It is the highest aim of my life to right wrongs," she said, earnestly, "and in the work you mention I shall have ample opportunity."

"Well, you have an extraordinary nature," laughed Miss Merton, happily. "Now, I confess that I haven't much taste in that direction, for, as I said before, Tom has all the graces of the family."

"I must be excused for not believing that," said Marion, archly, "although I am sure that your brother must be lovely, Miss Merton, and it will be a pleasure to me to feel that I am helping him. Yet it is such a peculiar line of work—it almost scares me to think of it."

"Oh, I fancy it's not hard," was Miss Merton's answer. "It's just keeping your eyes open for the dishonest ones in the store. That is really all it amounts to, Miss Marlowe."

"Let us hope that they are few and far between," said Marion, soberly. "For of all distressing things, dishonesty is the worst! Sometimes, do you know, I find myself almost loathing a dishonest person, and that is not the spirit with which to approach them."

"You will be both just and generous—I am sure of that," said Miss Merton, and as Marion rose to go she added, sweetly: "And you must come down this evening and talk with Tom; but I warn you, dearie, not to fall in love with him!"

"As if you could stop me," was Marion's laughing rejoinder. "Why, Miss Merton, I do believe I am half in love with him already!"

Miss Merton closed the door with a happy smile on her lips, and as she moved about the room she whispered softly: "The dearest girl in the world! If Tom ever marries, I hope it will be a girl like Marion Marlowe!"

CHAPTER VI

THE SECRET ERRAND

That very evening Marion made the acquaintance of Tom Merton. He was the buyer of laces and neckwear in one of the

large dry goods stores, and as his sister had said, he was a "big, splendid fellow."

Marion was charmed with the kindness which this good man possessed, and in his turn he became almost rapturously interested in the fair country girl's welfare.

The work that his sister had suggested was outlined to her in full, and Mr. Merton was delighted that he had found a person so well fitted to fill the proffered position.

For the office of "Private Shopper" was not an easy one to fill. There were scores of applicants, but few women were just and generous enough to their sex to fill the requirements which Thomas Merton exacted. For besides being a buyer, he was at the head of this department, which looked out for the honesty and competency of the employees of the store at the same time that it guaranteed civility and attention to customers.

Marion's position at the store was to remain a secret. Not a human soul besides Mr. Merton and his sister was to know that the firm of Howard & Howard were paying for her services. She was to come and go—look, listen and question—but through it all she was to preserve her identity as an outsider, and merely report her observations to Mr. Merton in the evening.

It was a position which no limited brain could fill, and one which no prejudiced or unjust mind should be allowed to fill under any condition. When Marion went to bed that night her soul was fired with ambition. She would silently, gently, but with all the determination of her spirit, be a friend indeed to the many unwise clerks as well as a loyal helper to her employers.

Little did she dream what a duty was hers or how her kindly services would be received by some whose welfare, perhaps, she was jealously guarding.

She expected petty faults and the many shortcomings of ignorance, but that she was soon to be involved in nefarious schemes or the victim of plots against her own safety and honor did not once enter her fair head as she lay upon her pillow. She was up early in the morning and over at the studio. Madame Leopold's room was across the hall from her own at the hotel, but the studio was located upon Fifth Avenue, a few blocks away.

As she hurried along she mailed a note to "Crippled Danny," and in it, according to her promise, she had placed another dollar. She fully intended visiting him before the day was done, but fate once more baffled her intentions.

Only one cloud dimmed the horizon of her otherwise perfect day. Miss Ross came in just as Marion finished her lesson, and Madame Leopold began a conversation in which both her pupils were addressed. Marion smiled politely. She could not be rude to anyone; but Miss Merton's words still rang in her ears, and made her feel faint as she greeted and talked with this treacherous girl.

There was no scowl of jealousy on the young woman's face now, for, like Marion, she was endeavoring to be polite and to hide her evil thoughts and feelings, if she harbored any, in her bosom. She was only about eighteen, and her face was almost as fair as Marion's. It was marred only by a sallow skin and an expression of malice and cunning.

She sang a little, a mediocre contralto, which was quite eclipsed by Marion's marvelous voice, which encompassed all ranges in the most surprising manner. As the madame chatted on, she suddenly made what seemed to Marion a very unwise remark.

The young girl had not learned that it was her teacher's way to thus wound the feelings of her least satisfactory pupils.

"Miss Marlowe will be ready for light opera in a year," she said, proudly, "and in

two I shall see her on the stage at the Metropolitan. Her voice is wonderful. I must let you hear it."

"Oh, madame, don't," said Marion, quickly, as she noticed a dark frown settling over the features of the less fortunate girl.

"Why, Miss Ross does not mind," said Madame Leopold, sweetly. "She is not so well favored as you, yet her voice is very good. She has already sung once or twice in concert, and of course that is her ambition."

"Indeed, it is not!" spoke up Miss Ross, sharply. "You have told me over and over, madame, that you would make an opera singer of me, and Heaven knows I have paid you enough money already!"

"Only a few thousand dollars, dear," said the portly madame, with another smile. "It costs much more than that to make singers of some people."

Marion could not quite understand her teacher's mood, but for once she could understand Miss Merton's words, when she said that there were times when she "almost pitied" the young woman.

"Perhaps that is why she looks so wretched," she thought to herself. Then another glance at the girl steeled her heart a little.

"Well, I'm about done," remarked Miss Ross, with a cold tone in her voice. "One quarter more will end my musical education."

Marion waited to hear her teacher exclaim, but there was only a slight cough to cover the omission.

Five minutes later Marion was out on the street. She breathed a sigh of relief to be out of Bessie Ross' presence. The young girl walked directly to Messrs. Howard & Howard's, which was the largest dry goods store in that section of the city.

She experienced a peculiar sensation as she entered the door. She was going in under false colors, but her errand was honorable.

Almost before she got in the door she became morbidly self-conscious.

It seemed to her that the clerks all read her secret, and that they were on their guard the moment she spoke to them.

Suddenly she realized how absurd all this was. Not one of them had ever seen her before or could possibly suspect her secret mission.

She walked about boldly after this, looking at the goods on the counters. There were a great many customers, and the store was fairly humming with business.

"Poor things!" she thought, as she noticed how tired the clerks looked.

Then she went over abruptly and spoke to the most dejected-looking girl whom she had thus far seen standing behind the counters.

CHAPTER VII.

MARION DOES A LITTLE SHADOWING.

"Will you kindly show me something in pink silk taffeta and gros-grain, please?" she said, very politely.

The girl turned on her with an insolent stare.

"Which do you want—taffeta or gros grain?" she asked, sharply: "and what shade of pink do you want—light, dark or medium?"

Marion was astonished for a moment, and did not answer, while the girl stood scowling at her, as though she wished she would hurry.

"Show me both styles and every shade that you have," she said finally. "Then I can make my choice and be perfectly satisfied."

The girl turned away with a toss of her head, and just at that instant another clerk came up to her.

"This is the third time this morning I've had to pull all those goods down," she mut-

tered, "and just as like as not she won't buy a yard."

Marion heard her distinctly, but she did not reply. She was beginning to wonder if all the clerks were like this one, and, if so, how Howard & Howard managed to do such a business.

As the girl threw the silks down on the counter, Marion examined them carefully. She had to keep up the appearance of being an outsider while she was secretly studying this insolent clerk's manner.

"If I should report her, she would lose her place," Marion thought as she fingered the silks. "But she doesn't deserve to have a position, when she is so cross and rude; still, she looks so thin and pale. Poor thing! I am sorry for her."

Another customer had come up to the counter, and the girl went forward to wait upon her. As Marion glanced at her out of the corner of her eye, she was surprised to observe the change in her manner.

While she was not overpleasant, she was polite and courteous, and after a minute Marion noticed that they had exchanged meaning glances.

The woman, who was middle-aged and shabbily dressed, leaned heavily upon the counter, and as the girl showed her some silks she seemed to be studying the prices attentively.

Suddenly she ordered a few yards of a piece that Marion had been examining, and the girl made out a check and took the money.

Marion's quick eyes were watching the whole transaction, and as the girl wrote her check she caught sight of the figures.

A moment more and the check and the money had gone down through the tube to the cashier, while the silk was tossed carelessly up to the busy packer.

As the girl's back was turned, Marion pulled the piece of silk toward her. It was marked two dollars a yard, but the check had been made out for only a dollar.

This bit of dishonesty startled Marion terribly. She almost gasped, but recovered herself in an instant.

Then, as the girl turned back, she laid her hand on the same silk that the woman had bought, and, acting on Mr. Merton's directions, ordered that four yards be cut for her.

"Two dollars a yard—eight dollars," said the girl, as she made out the check. Marion paid her out of the money that Mr. Merton had given her for the purpose. What she wanted was to get the clerk's handwriting and number.

As she walked on slowly through the store, her brain was in a whirl. She had just been initiated into a form of dishonesty which made her blood run cold with horror.

"It is dreadful," she whispered, as she thought of the girl's coolness. "There is no impulse about that—it is cold, deliberate thieving."

Then she began to wonder who the woman was, and in a moment her keen eyes were searching the store over for her.

She discovered her at the men's neckwear department, and walked slowly up beside her. As she paused, apparently to examine some goods, she overheard the woman talking to one of the male clerks, who had sprung forward with great alacrity to wait upon her.

"That tie is a dollar and a half," said the young man, in an unnecessarily loud voice, as he took one from the case and handed it to the woman.

He threw several others down on the counter a moment later, and then, as the woman said something very softly, he nodded and said: "All right, madam."

Marion asked one of the clerks for a tie of a certain shade, and while he went to look for it she watched what was going on before her without in any way appearing to do so

The clerk wrote out his check for a dollar and a half; then, with a wonderfully quick motion of his hands, he removed the tag and attached it to a tie that was much more expensive, and which had borne no tag originally.

As before, the goods were wrapped without the packer discovering the fraud, for in each case they were nothing but young boys, who looked no further than the figures on the goods handed them.

The other clerks at the counter were all too busy to notice, and, indeed, the whole thing had been done so quickly that even Marion, who had seen it, almost doubted her own senses!

This time she was unable to get the fellow's number, as another clerk was waiting upon her, but she scrutinized him closely, so as to be able to identify him.

Again it occurred to her to try and save this man's position, and again came the thought that he was utterly unworthy.

"And to think of the hundreds of honest young men and women who are without work," she thought as she left the building. "Oh, I did not dream that such work as this was before me!"

But the young girl did not shrink from her disagreeable task. These people were dishonest, and it was her duty to punish them.

She would have stayed in the store longer, but the shabbily-dressed woman had left it, and it had occurred to Marion that perhaps it would be wise to follow her.

It was the first bit of "shadowing" that she had ever done, but she did it cleverly, always keeping far enough away so that the woman would never suspect what she was doing.

At the very next store they came to the woman stopped, standing for several minutes and staring in at the windows.

Marion was just across the way, also gazing in at a window, but turning every other minute in the woman's direction.

Suddenly a coarse, flashily-dressed man walked by on the woman's side of the street, and as he passed the woman he nodded to her familiarly.

"Terence O'Connell, I do believe!" said Marion, almost aloud. "It is his figure exactly, but where are his whiskers?"

She stared at the man until she was sure that she was not mistaken. It was surely the poor beggar who had called on her the night before, but now he was well dressed, and a diamond shone in his shirt front, and as she had noticed at first, he was minus his whiskers.

"Well, of all strange things!" thought the astonished girl. "To think that I should know him the minute I saw him. Why, I am beginning to think that I am a born detective."

She started slowly across the street, and then quickened her steps a little.

The woman had suddenly entered the store, and she was anxious to keep in sight of her.

She darted over the crossing and into the store, but the woman had disappeared. She could not find her.

As Marion hurried through the aisles, looking sharply about her, she came upon a large group of shoppers crowding about a small "bargain" counter.

Suddenly there was a shriek from one of the eager shoppers. She began screaming lustily that her pocket-book had been stolen.

Marion stepped back to one side, where she could see what happened, and as the other shoppers in the store heard the woman's shrieks they all came rushing in that direction.

"I tell you I felt some one's hand in my pocket!" screamed the woman, hysterically. "I grabbed as quick as I could, but she had got it, the miserable creature!"

"Have you any idea which one it was?" asked one of the floor-walkers, coming up.

"How could I tell in this jam?" was the woman's answer. "Oh, find her, do! I haven't another cent of money!"

Marion moved slowly away. She could be of no service.

As she passed the counter the crowd broke open a little.

She was still looking for the woman with the shabby dress, so she was thoroughly surprised when Bessie Ross confronted her. She had been in the thick of the crowd, standing close to the table.

Marion looked away just in time to avoid bowing to her, and at that moment she caught a glimpse of the woman she sought.

She was evidently on her way to the rear door of the building, and as she stepped out on the sidewalk Marion saw something that astounded her. A carriage with two magnificent horses was standing at the curb.

There was a coachman in livery on the box and a footman stood waiting just outside the store entrance. As he saw the shabbily-dressed woman he touched his hat respectfully. The next moment she had entered the carriage and was being driven away rapidly.

Marion looked at her watch. She had been out three hours. There was no time for anything more to-day.

The madame would expect her at the hotel in half an hour. She would have to pay her visit to Danny some time in the evening.

CHAPTER VIII.

ACCUSED OF SHOPLIFTING.

Fortunately for Marion, Mr. Merton did not come home to dinner, and she was obliged to wait for him so long that a visit to Danny that night was impossible. If she had known what she escaped she would not have mourned so over it, but the generous girl was really eager to see and help the poor cripple.

Once more her stern sense of duty hindered her. She owed it to Mr. Merton to tell him what she had learned as soon as possible, and then, again, she longed almost feverishly to get it all off of her conscience.

Danny's dollar would probably supply him with the necessaries of life, but Marion determined to see him the very first thing the following morning. She spent the entire evening running back and forth from her room to Miss Merton's, but both brother and sister remained absent. So at eleven o'clock she sadly retired, and her terrible knowledge kept her tossing and wakeful far into the night.

It was the woman with the shabby clothing that stood out clearest in her mind—the woman who left her carriage at one store while she visited another, and who certainly did not dress so poorly except for some ulterior purpose.

It had been the young girl's good fortune to find all this treachery at once, instead of coming upon it gradually, as would ordinarily have happened.

Of course, there were dishonest clerks in every store, but Marion was justified in thinking that this was no haphazard thing—it looked more like a case of systematic robbery.

Who was this shabby woman with the handsome carriage? And how did it happen that Terence O'Connell knew her?

These questions annoyed her, for she quite wisely decided that it was in the answer to them that she would find the key to the solution of the whole matter.

The clerks knew the woman, and were robbing their employers for her with a recklessness that astonished the innocent country girl.

It would have been so easy to have detected their acts! Surely the buyers and "heads of stock" must notice these discrepancies, if not in a day or a week, most certainly in a month.

and then no doubt speedy discovery of the plot would follow—

Unless—

Here Marion caught her breath with a sudden gasp.

Unless there was a regularly organized system for plundering the house, in which not only the clerks, but their superiors, were participants.

It began to look as if the work laid out for her was too great for her strength, but it did not occur to her once to even suggest abandoning it. As soon as she had finished practicing the next morning she started out.

It was a beautiful fall morning, the air clear and mild.

"And to think that blackness dwells in the human heart," she sighed, sadly. "With so much sunshine all about, how can one grope in the darkness of evil deeds or stoop to acts that will smirch their souls forever!"

She had decided to spend an hour in the store, and then, after a bite of luncheon, go straight to Danny.

But once more the hand of fate intervened, and in place of doing an errand of mercy the young girl was to be made the victim of a crime which might have branded her innocence and honor forever.

As she entered the store, she felt even sadder than ever. The weight of her responsibility was growing momentarily heavier.

Again she strolled carelessly about, glancing over the goods on the counters and occasionally asking the price of an article that pleased her fancy.

But although she spent a full hour in the store, she did not see any dishonesty; neither did she see the shabbily-dressed woman whom she had seen the day before, although she was constantly on the lookout for her.

Just as she was leaving by the main entrance several women passed her. Someone jostled her arm, and she half turned to see who had done it.

Bessie Ross slipped past her, as if she were in extraordinary haste, and as she did so Marion felt her thrust something under her arm. The next second it fell with a thud and Bessie had vanished.

In an instant a crowd of women had surrounded Marion, who stood, white as a sheet, looking down at what had fallen.

"Caught in the act!" said a voice in her ear. "Trying to carry it away under your cape, eh?"

Marion did not raise her eyes for the space of a second. She was staring at the large gold-monogramed pocket-book that lay on the floor at her feet, and wondering what it was best for her to do in this emergency.

"You'll have to come to the office," said the loud voice again, and then a woman detective employed by the store placed a hand determinedly upon Marion's shoulder.

The crowd of women were all staring at Marion now, and their remarks were as cruel as though she had already been proven guilty.

"She's a slick one, I tell you! Why, I saw the lady that she stole it from! And she was a lady, too. She did not even whimper when she lost it."

"No—she had more sense," said the woman detective, dryly. "She knew me by sight, and she came right out and told me about it."

"She don't look like a thief," said another, staring rudely at Marion. "But you can never tell," she added. "Folks that has the most innocent faces are sometimes the worst thieves."

Marion looked at her calmly, her face still as white as snow.

The woman detective had picked up the pocket-book without once taking her hand from Marion's shoulder.

"She should be taught a lesson," said one of the crowd to the detective. "It's the only way you can protect honest customers."

"Yes, don't let her beg off," cried another woman. "No doubt she will say she's got a sick husband and seven young ones."

To save herself, Marion could not help bursting out laughing. The husband would have been bad enough without the "young ones."

Suddenly she threw her head back and stared at the crowd coolly, and as she spoke to them all a sad smile curved her lips. She was pitying them for their cruel, merciless natures.

"Ladies," she said, calmly, "you are just a bit hasty in your judgments. If you stood in my place, would you care to be treated as you

are treating me—accused of a crime and then convicted unheard and without so much as a word of evidence against me?"

There was a breathless silence, and the detective removed her hand from the young girl's shoulder. The conviction had come to her instantly that her prisoner was innocent. No voice could ring like that if there was treachery behind it.

"Some person, a woman, pushed that under my arm," went on Marion, quietly. "I was so surprised that it fell, and the woman vanished. While you have been keeping guard over me, the guilty person has escaped. Now, I insist that you take me at once to the office."

"It will be necessary, miss, I am sorry to say," said the detective, quickly. "But, tell me, did this woman wear a long gray cape, and was she about eighteen years old and rather pretty, but haggard?"

Marion turned toward her calmly, her beautiful lips compressed and stern.

"Excuse me, please," she said, very quietly. "I shall not describe her until you take me to the office."

"Then come," said the detective, as she led the way.

With only a scornful glance at the crowd of curious women, the brave girl turned promptly and followed the detective.

CHAPTER IX.

GIVING A DETECTIVE THE SLIP.

But the detective was not destined to take Marion to the office, for as they passed side by side through the wide aisles the young girl was doing a lot of fast thinking.

It would ruin her usefulness in the store to be known. Even Mr. Merton had warned her that he would not even bow to her if he saw her. She must conceal her identity at all hazards for his sake, and at just that moment she saw her opportunity.

The detective was so sure that she was going to the office voluntarily that she did not even look around when Marion fell a step behind her.

Not twenty feet away was the side door of the building. Just as Marion glanced at it eagerly two women came down the aisle, and by stopping for a second she let them pass between her and the detective.

The next second, without a word, she turned and followed them, walking no faster than she would under ordinary circumstances. As she reached the sidewalk she burst out laughing, but the danger was not over yet. She must get away as soon as possible.

A car was passing, and she swung herself on to it cleverly, not so much as saying "by your leave" to either gripman or conductor.

"That was a pretty risky thing to do, miss," said the conductor, sharply.

Marion smiled and handed him her nickel without speaking. She was too amused at her own action to bother with the conductor.

"I gave her the slip that time," she thought as she rode along. "Won't she be surprised when she turns around! Still, I'm satisfied that she knew I wasn't guilty."

She had reached her hotel before she thought of Danny, but as she was tired and excited she took time to rest a minute.

She must see Miss Merton, if not her brother. It would relieve her a little to tell what had happened.

"Out again," she said, disappointedly, as she knocked at the door and got no response. "That means I must keep my horrid secrets a while longer."

She walked slowly up one flight of stairs to the third floor of the building and opened her own door, feeling sad and dispirited.

"I may as well eat my luncheon, now I am here," she thought, as she was bathing her face. "After that nothing shall deter me from calling on the cripple."

Madame Leopold knocked on the door just as Marion finished her toilet. Marion knew why she had come. She had not heard her practicing.

"Oh, madame! I can't sing to-day!" she began the moment the door was opened. "Please don't scold me! I am feeling abominably! I am sure I should flat awfully."

"But why?" asked the teacher, giving her pupil a sharp look.

"I guess I am a bit blue," was Marion's sad answer. "It isn't very often that I feel that way—but, oh, dear! there's so much misery in the world that it depresses me awfully.

Why should I sing, madame, while others are weeping?"

"Nonsense," said Madame Leopold, sternly. "You are getting morbid, Marion! As if you were to bear the burden of all the misery in creation!"

"I must bear my share," said the young girl, soberly, "or someone else will be overloaded."

"You must think first of yourself—of your own welfare," said her teacher, a little sharply; "and it will never do for you to omit your practice."

"Madame Leopold, I want to ask you a question," was Marion's only answer. She was looking her teacher straight in the eyes, with an expression of great eagerness.

"Why was it that you spoke so to Miss Ross yesterday, madame? If you had spoken that way to me, I should have considered it an insult."

There was nothing commanding or discourteous in her tone. She had simply asked a question in her usual sweet manner.

Madame Leopold crossed her fat hands over each other as she spoke, and for a moment her face expressed a tinge of cunning.

"I wish to get rid of Miss Ross," she said, quietly, "and for reasons of my own I took pains to insult her."

Marion's honest eyes dilated with astonishment. She could hardly wait for the woman's explanation.

"Bessie Ross is dishonest," said Madame Leopold, calmly. "I have missed a number of things from the studio, Marion, and I have proven beyond a doubt that my pupil stole them."

"Mercy!" gasped Marion. "Is she as bad as that? Then I am not mistaken! She did it deliberately. Oh, she is terribly wicked, and I shall not hesitate to expose her."

It was Madame Leopold's turn to be astonished now, but for reasons of her own Marion hesitated about telling her what had happened.

"You shall hear my story of her dishonesty to-morrow, madame," she said, firmly. "And, oh, I am so glad that you knew you were right, for, do you know, I pitied her very deeply that morning."

"Well, try and save your pity for a more deserving person," said the madame, laughing; "for I should have had that girl arrested long ago if it had not been that I hated the publicity of the matter."

There was another light tap on Marion's door, and a chambermaid handed her a note that Miss Merton had left for her. Madame Leopold left the room just then, so she read it immediately.

It was merely to tell her that Miss Merton would be home that evening, and that both she and her brother would be delighted to have Marion's company.

The fair girl smiled a little sadly as she read the note.

Her two days as private shopper had been wonderfully successful ones. She dreaded telling what she had learned to honest Tom Merton.

CHAPTER X.

MR. MERTON'S ADMIRATION.

Five minutes later Marion was on her way to see the cripple. It was a long ride to his home, and she was obliged to change cars twice.

On nearing her destination, she suddenly remembered that she did not know the number. It was on Cherry street, but that was as much as she could remember.

A search through her pocket showed her that she had forgotten the note. There was nothing to be done but to go back and get it.

To say that she was disgusted was putting it mildly, for the day was waning and Marion was tired and unhappy. When she reached the hotel her sister Dollie was waiting there for her, so once more Marion was obliged to abandon her errand of mercy.

Dollie stayed to dinner, and Marion entertained her gayly. Not for worlds would she have told her all the secrets of human depravity that she was learning.

It was bad enough to have to tell her news to Mr. Merton, so when Dollie left she had not received so much as an inkling of her sister's true feelings.

But Marion was not the girl to shirk disagreeable duties. At eight o'clock she was sitting with the Mertons, and had told them in detail of her two days' experience, omitting

only the names of Terence O'Connell and crippled Danny.

Miss Merton held up her hands in horror at the recital. It did not seem possible to her that people could be so wicked, and she was particularly grieved over the shop-lifting episode, for she knew just how deeply it must have hurt the brave girl before her.

Before her brother could speak, she turned to Marion.

"Now, do you know what I wanted to tell you the other day about Miss Ross! You see, she has been suspected before of being dishonest—in fact, my brother has had her watched in the store; haven't you, Tom? and once their detective was almost sure that he saw her stealing."

"Why didn't they arrest her and put an end to it at once?" asked Marion, quickly.

Tom Merton shook his head.

"They wanted to," he said, simply; "but somehow she looked so miserable that I wouldn't let them do it."

"That's just like Tom, you know," said his sister, looking at him proudly. "He would cut his hand off before he would take the chance of misjudging a woman."

"A fine fault to have, if it is a fault," cried Marion, promptly. Then she looked smilingly at Mr. Merton, only to find his gaze fixed on her admiringly.

Tom Merton was a man of forty, but he was splendidly formed, and his face was as free from wrinkles as a boy of twenty.

He was a man of exemplary sentiments and habits, and the nobility of his soul shone in his jovial countenance.

"I guess I have a weakness for women, as they call it," he said, laughingly. "Anyway, I would rather suffer most anything than to be unjust to one of them; but this matter of the clerks has astounded me, Miss Marlowe."

A serious look had followed his recent laughter. He was confronted by a problem that was distressing.

"Palmer, our superintendent, has had his suspicions for some time," he went on, "but he has so much faith in our system that he did not think it was possible to beat it, unless—as seems to be exactly the case—there is a regular organized method among the clerks for getting the best of it."

"Well, it does look like that," said his sister, quickly. "But who can that woman be whom Miss Marlowe speaks of—the one with the shabby clothes, who drives in her carriage?"

Tom Merton was thoughtful, but he could not answer the question, but, with the aid of the check which Marion showed him, he had been able to identify one, at least, of the offenders.

"That girl is a Miss Day," he said, as he glanced at it. "Her number is 419. I remember her distinctly."

"Do you know anything against her?" asked his sister, quickly.

"Only that the head of stock has been half crazy for a month. She has not only been missing silks, but her stock is badly jumbled, and our detectives, so far, have not been able to help her."

"I guess it was just luck that I saw it," said Marion. "If I didn't have such sharp eyes, I could never have seen those figures."

Once more Tom Merton bent upon her an admiring glance. She was so beautiful, so innocent, and yet so clever.

"What will you do about it, Tom?" asked his sister, anxiously.

Tom Merton had been thinking of that very thing, and was ready to answer her question promptly.

"I shall tell our detectives to speak to Miss Ross the first time they see her, and warn her that if she is ever seen in the store again she will be arrested, and then I shall find out also who that shabby woman is, and just how many of our clerks are standing in with her. I have no doubt that I shall find that she is a regular crook, and she may be carrying on this game in every store in the city.

"Oh, you have stirred up a hornet's nest with your sharp eyes, I can assure you, Miss Marlowe! But tell me, are you disgusted with your work, or will you continue to help me?"

His voice grew tender as he asked the question, and as he looked eagerly at Marion there was no mistaking the admiration in his expression.

A soft flush covered the girl's cheeks, but her eyes sparkled with eagerness as she replied:

"Oh, I shall be glad to help you, if I can, Mr. Merton! I am ready to carry it to the bitter end. I shan't turn back when I can see so plainly that my services are needed!"

"You are a brave girl," cried Miss Merton. "You are just brimming over with spunk! Why, I'd be frightened to death if I got into any such mess!"

"Well, if you had seen me bolt out of that side door, you would have thought I was a bit scared myself," said Marion, laughing. "But in that case I thought discretion was better than valor. I did not wish to spoil my usefulness by being taken to the office."

"That was grand of you, Miss Marlowe," cried Tom Merton, cordially. "The idea of your thinking of your duty to the store when you were in such a predicament!"

"It was about all I did think of," said Marion, simply, and just at that moment a proposition occurred to her. "Oh, Mr. Merton!" she said, quickly, "will you do me a favor? Let me ferret out this mystery of the shabby woman! I have a clew to work on, and I shall enjoy doing it so much! If I don't learn who she is in twenty-four hours, you are at liberty to put one of your detectives on the track of her."

"Oh, don't, Miss Marlowe! It might take you into danger!" cried Miss Merton.

"I hate to say yes, Miss Marlowe; still, if you really wish it, I will; but be cautious, my dear girl—you don't know what it may lead to!"

Tom Merton spoke seriously, and with a little restraint. It hurt him strangely to give her the permission.

During the entire forty years of his life no woman had ever made his heart beat so fast as did this beautiful, gray eyed girl, with her impulsive manners.

When he said good-night to her he held her hand for a moment, and the touch of her soft, tapered fingers sent the blood whirling through his veins. When she had finally gone a cloud seemed to settle down upon him.

It was as if the light had in some way been completely obscured, and an unaccountable feeling of loneliness stole over him.

He turned at last to find his sister watching him intently. There were tears in her eyes, but her lips were smiling bravely.

"I knew you would like her," she said, as he walked directly up to her. "She is a sweet woman, and the only one I ever saw whom I wanted for a sister," she added, laughingly.

CHAPTER XI.

MARION'S CLEVER RUSE.

Marion hurried her singing lesson the next morning, for she was anxious to be out on her self-imposed errand. As she walked toward the store, she was thinking deeply, and her gray eyes shone with unusual excitement. The clew which she had spoken of to Mr. Merton had come as an after-thought almost, while they were talking, and now she was blaming herself bitterly for her own stupidity.

It may have been a peculiar thing for a young girl to notice, but she had noticed it nevertheless, and yet had not attached to it a particle of significance at the time when, perhaps, it was the very thing which would identify the woman.

As Marion had stood gazing at the shining carriage and the handsomely equipped horses her quick eyes had been attracted to a monogram on the carriage, and which she had even seen glittering on the corner of the carriage robe.

The letters were in silver, and they were "A. D. S."

She recalled them distinctly, now that she had reason for doing so.

But how should she find out what "A. D. S." meant? No doubt they were the initials of the owner of the carriage. Suddenly it occurred to Marion to adopt a little ruse in order to secure the desired information.

She had noticed that the "door opener" who stood just outside of that particular store was a genial, bluff, good-natured Irishman.

Without an instant's hesitation she walked up and spoke to him.

"Can you tell me who the lady is who owns those handsome horses with the silver-mounted harness? There is a monogram 'A. D. S.' on the blankets and on the carriage," she said, sweetly.

The bluff Irishman looked down into her innocent face.

"Bless yer swate face, miss, that do be a very rich loidy," he answered, promptly.

"Sure her name is Simpson or Sampson or the loikes o' that. She's a rale swell custoomer av ther store in spoite av her owld clothes that do be's just fit fer ther scarecrows."

Marion thanked him and went on. She did not dare question further. Her next move was to go to a drug-store and study a directory.

There was not a Simpson in the book with the initials "A. D.," but almost at the first glance she found a Mrs. A. D. Sampson.

A memorandum of the address speedily followed this find and Marion was well on her road to an important discovery.

An hour later Mrs. Sampson received an unexpected caller. It was a young lady who asked to see her on urgent business.

The home of Mrs. Sampson was almost a palace, and the lady herself appeared in the parlor so handsomely gowned that her caller hardly knew her.

"I have taken the liberty of calling, madam, to see if I can interest you in this excellent book, the 'Life of Abraham Lincoln,' with full-page illustrations," began Marion, nervily.

The next moment the woman's scowl stopped the words on her lips, and she began to wonder what form of punishment was about to be meted out to her.

"How dare you enter my house on such an errand?" almost screamed the woman. "Urgent business, indeed! This is a most impudent intrusion!"

"I guess it is, madam," muttered Marion, as she started unceremoniously for the door, "but I am sorry I can't interest you in Abraham Lincoln!"

The woman was still scolding vociferously when she closed the door behind the girl with a slam, and as Marion reached the sidewalk she burst out laughing.

"I'm lucky to get out as easy as I did," she whispered, merrily, "and anyway I know who she is now beyond a doubt, and it has only cost me a dollar for this copy of the 'Life of Lincoln.'"

It was the cleverest bit of detective work that Marion had ever done, and she could not help congratulating herself a little.

"I just wanted to see for myself," she thought, as she hurried home, "for, as Mr. Merton says, I would not be unjust to any one."

So this woman who lived in a palace was a veritable rogue! She was mean and wicked enough to employ poor clerks to steal for her or, what was exactly the same thing, to defraud their employers.

No doubt she paid them well for their work, but it was a depth of infamy that Marion could not fathom.

In less than an hour she was strolling through Howard & Howard's, and as the woman detective passed she winked at Marion slyly.

Marion knew by that that Mr. Merton must have told her who she was, and it was a relief to feel that she would not be molested.

As she walked through the store she found nothing to alarm her. Some of the clerks were uncivil, but that seemed almost trivial.

Once or twice she saw glances exchanged between some of the girls, and it occurred to her that perhaps they had heard that she was a shop-lifter, and for a moment she was annoyed and confused by their glances.

If she had known that they were merely commenting on her beauty it would doubtless have relieved her feelings considerably.

But Marion was as modest as she was beautiful and brave, so these frequent glances still remained a mystery.

Some of the girls attracted her by their honest faces, and she shuddered to think how closely they were associated with criminals.

Just as she left the store she met Dr. Brookes. He was on his way to visit a patient.

He drew her aside, up close to the show windows, and for perhaps ten minutes they chatted cordially.

"I have a great deal to tell you," said Marion, suddenly. "It is such a long story that I would not dream of telling it here, but perhaps"—here she looked at him shyly—"perhaps I could prevail upon you to call this evening."

"I will be there at eight, sharp," was the doctor's prompt answer. "But, Marion, tell me, are you in any sort of trouble? There is a look in your eyes that I don't quite fancy."

Marion closed her eyes quickly and

laughed softly as she replied: "You see too much. Your eyes must be X-rays, Dr. Reginald Brookes, but I promise to tell all—every word—to-night."

"Then *au revoir,*" said the young physician, smiling. "And I have a story to tell, too, Marion, but it will keep until this evening."

The tender look in his eyes was not to be mistaken, and with a blush the young girl took leave of him.

Dr. Brookes had loved her for a long time, she knew, but for weeks now he had obeyed her wish and said nothing about it.

She wondered if once more he was going to put his fate to the test.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VISIT TO THE CRIPPLE.

When Marion reached the hotel she found both Mr. Merton and his sister on the lookout for her.

Mr. Merton's face looked almost haggard from worriment, and his voice was husky with emotion as he opened the conversation.

"The little ball you started rolling has grown enormously," he began, sadly, "and I can assure you, you have given our detective a lot of business! Why, do you know, even some of our cashiers are in that deal! We are simply overflooded with dishonest employees, Miss Marlowe."

"It is simply dreadful," broke in his sister, eagerly. "And yet, even now, Tom is mourning because he must punish them."

"Oh, but they deserve it, the most of them at any rate!" said Marion, warmly. "This is not impulsive or necessary thieving; it is just cold-blooded, deliberate trickery."

"Exactly what I told Tom," said Miss Merton, nodding.

"But some of them are actually very poor and ignorant," said her brother, sorrowfully. "They are in some instances even the children of thieves; their very natures are besmirched with the taint of viciousness. There is that Miss Day, for instance. She lives, you might say, in the slums. And they tell me she supports a crippled brother."

"That is no reason why she should steal," said Marion, firmly. "Her salary I am sure will cover the expenses of an apartment in such a locality."

"Of course you are right," said Mr. Merton, smiling. "It is just as sister says; my heart runs away with my judgment."

Marion looked at him gratefully. She was an admirer of such feelings, still in this case he should be firm; it was absolutely necessary.

"Now let me tell you the result of my detective work," she said, laughing. "I have found the shabby woman, only she wasn't shabby a bit, Mr. Merton!"

To say that her listeners were surprised does not express it. They both simply stared at her as she related her experience.

"Stealing, or as good as stealing, when she is rich!" cried Miss Merton, when the story was finished.

Tom Merton was silent from something more than surprise, for Marion's identification of the woman had brought with it a revelation.

When he did finally speak, it was Marion's turn to be astonished, for his words explained the whole situation.

"Mrs. A. D. Sampson owns a large retail store in one of the most flourishing towns in New Jersey," he said, slowly. "She lives in this city and is worth about a hundred thousand dollars.

"I think I understand her game," he went on, thoughtfully. "Her shopping is done usually in our rival stores, but the goods that she buys over our counters are our own special novelties that she cannot get elsewhere. No doubt she wants them for her store, and has an arrangement with the clerks whereby she gets a good deal more than the usual discount."

"I should imagine she might almost replenish her stock if she does that in all the stores," said his sister, sarcastically.

"Well, her game is ended now, thanks to Miss Marlowe," said Mr. Merton. "I shall have her watched constantly, and of course we shall look after the clerk that waits on her, very sharply. Oh, it is surprising what tricks some people will stoop to!" he added, sadly. "And as Miss Marlowe says, when there is no 'necessity.'"

Marion left them a little later with Mr

Merton more in love with her than ever. It was both her innocence and her cleverness that were charming him now, for together they formed a most fascinating combination.

A few hours later Marion was peering at the squalid tenement-houses in one of the most wretched streets in the city, looking sharply for the number which Danny, the cripple, had sent her.

She found it at last, and as she mounted the rickety steps that led to the door, a pair of sharp eyes gazed down at her from a battered window.

Danny, the cripple, was a reality indeed; and as he stood peering through the window, with his crutch in his hand, he presented a pitiful spectacle of misfortune. He was a slight boy of ten, a hunchback, and deformed by one wretched leg, with a face distorted by pain and viciousness.

As soon as he saw Marion coming he hobbled across the hall, making no sound with his crutch, for fear that she would hear him.

"She's a comin'! She's a comin'!" he whispered, shrilly, as he pushed open a dirty door and confronted Liz O'Connell.

"Then be quick wid yez! Inter ther bed an' be a groanin' loike mad!" whispered the woman, sharply, as she ran over and dragged the cot out of the dirty closet.

"Now, remember, you brat, not a wurrd or I'll break iviry bone in yer miserable body! Make her think ye air so sick that yer likely ter croak in er minit an' if she comes down han'some youse shall have a fair share o' ther divvy."

There was no time to say more, for Marion was tapping on the door.

She had been directed to Liz O'Connell's rooms by a blear-eyed woman out on the landing.

The crippled lad had hidden himself under the tattered blanket, but at her knock he suddenly began groaning—such pitiful, heart-rending groans that Liz O'Connell nearly bent double in her efforts to keep from laughing.

"Youse are doin' it beautiful—keep it up—she's a good graft," she whispered, and just then there came a louder rap, so there was no more time to be wasted.

Putting her apron to her eyes, Liz O'Connell limped to the door. As she opened it Marion stepped in, her eyes dilated with horror.

"Oh, madam! who is groaning so terribly?" she asked at once.

Liz wiped her eyes with her apron and pointed to the cripple.

As Marion caught sight of his face her heart almost stopped beating. It was the most distorted countenance that she had ever seen, and the groans were so pitiful that she nearly fainted when she heard them.

"Is that Danny, madam?" she managed to say. Then, with a heroic effort, she bent over and knelt by him.

"Poor lad! Poor little lamb," moaned Liz O'Connell behind her apron. "Sure he's that bad loidy that 'm afeard he's a dyin'. I sint fer ther doctter, but Hivin only knows what's ter pay him."

"I will attend to that," said Marion, without looking up. "You are a good, kind woman to try to take care of him."

There was a step behind her, but Marion did not turn her head, for just at that moment Danny groaned more piteously than ever.

"Oh, you poor, poor boy!" said the young girl, softly, as she leaned forward and put one hand on the distorted forehead.

That instant a heavy blanket was thrown over Marion's head and wound so tightly about her throat that it completely stifled her.

Then two strong arms reached around her and pinioned her arms.

She was a prisoner in the place to which she had come as a ministering angel.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE.

Five minutes later the scene had changed. The blanket was unwound from Marion's head, and only just in time, for she was choking badly.

Liz O'Connell fanned her vigorously while some one held water to her lips, and after moments of misery Marion revived a little.

When she looked around she found that

Danny had vanished. The cot was still there but there was no sign of the cripple.

The woman, Liz O'Connell, stood watching her like a hawk. She had a glass in one hand and a piece of rope in the other.

But it was neither the woman nor the cripple that interested Marion, for, as she slowly turned in the chair on which they had placed her, she came face to face with Terence O'Connell.

She knew him at once in his flashy attire, and the big diamond in his shirt-front seemed to blink at her banefully.

Without a word the two stared at each other. Then the man reached slowly toward his hip-pocket and drew out a heavy revolver.

Marion's lips curled a little as she saw the weapon. It was proof to her mind that she was dealing with cowards.

She was still weak and faint, but this sight seemed to revive her. Every nerve in her body grew tense with the excitement of danger.

"Well, Mr. O'Connell, so this is your game!" she said, quietly. "You have decoyed me to this place, for what purpose, will you tell me?"

"Sure," said the man, bluffly. "We wants yer boodle, miss. Ye've got two t'ousand plunks in ther bank and a check-book in yer pocket."

Marion stared at the fellow in unbounded surprise.

"How did you know that?" she asked. "Are you a mind-reader, Mr. O'Connell?"

Her coolness astonished the man a little, but after a hasty glance at his sister he decided to answer.

"It don't matter how I knows," he said with an oath. "Wot I want yer to do is ter fill out four checks for five hundred apiece, if yer please, Miss Marlowe."

Liz O'Connell stepped forward and laid a bank-book down on the table. It was Marion's property, which the woman had extracted from her pocket.

"So you have robbed me already," said the young girl, indignantly. "Well, let me tell you, once and for all, that I will not do it!"

"Better t'ink twice, miss!" said the man, putting his hand on the pistol.

It occurred to Marion that she had better parley with this man—the look in his eyes had shown her that he was in desperate earnest.

"They won't shoot me, but they'll choke me," was the thought that ran through her brain, and the memory of that fearful sensation was still vivid in her memory.

"Don't you think you might leave me a little, Mr. O'Connell?" she asked, very sweetly. "It is all I have in the world. You surely will not begrudge me a few hundred."

A nasty sneer crossed the man's coarse features.

"A pretty gal like you can always get more," he said, roughly, "and, besides, don't I know yer has a rich feller? Naw, it's all or nuthin' wid Terence O'Connell!"

"But think, man, are you not taking big risks," asked Marion, quietly. "Do you imagine you can rob me and then escape from the law?"

"I'll take ther chances on dat," said the fellow, doggedly.

Marion glanced around the room and saw what he meant. There was absolutely nothing in the room that he could not easily leave behind him. No doubt the man and woman both had some safe place to flee to.

It began to look desperate, and there was no help at hand. The young girl racked her brain to find some way to outwit him.

"Come, we're wastin' val'able time, miss," said O'Connell again, as he moved a little nearer to his victim.

Marion looked at her check-book, which lay open before her, and then glanced involuntarily at the murderous pistol.

"Better do it," grinned the man, as he noticed her look. "Dere's no use a buckin' ag'inst Terence O'Connell!"

"But you cannot cash my checks," said Marion, hopelessly. "You will be arrested at the bank for trying to cash them."

"Not if ye O. K. ther sig's, as I intend ye shall," said the man, dryly. "So, come, git er move on ye, I'm gittin' tired of all dis talkin'!"

Once more he hitched his chair nearer, gripping the pistol tighter and putting one finger menacingly on the trigger.

Marion set her teeth hard and made her last play for time.

"But I'll stop the payment on them the minute I get out," she said, quickly. "So you'll not get the money after all, you wicked fellow!"

At this remark the man roared with laughter, the woman joining in with a vicious snicker.

"Sure, now, ye doesn't take Terence O'Connell for such a fool as dat, does ye, miss?" he asked. "Wot's de matter wid yer stayin' in dis room fer awhile, jest long enough say, fer Liz an' me ter skip ther town?"

Marion shuddered with horror at the awful suggestions, for who knew how long she would have to remain there a prisoner.

"Quick, give me the book!" she cried, in agony.

As she leaned over the table, Liz O'Connell put a pen between her fingers.

A moment later the woman disappeared into the inner room. She had gone to make ready for their flight from the building.

As Marion began to write Terence O'Connell laid his weapon down upon the table. He leaned over in her direction and watched each word as she wrote it, and so eager was he to see the check properly made out that just for one second he forgot the pistol.

It was the second that Marion had been waiting for, and she was quick to improve it.

Like a flash of lightning she made a grab for the weapon, and the next thing Terence O'Connell know he was looking down the barrel of his own weapon.

Marion had sprung far enough away to cover him safely, and the man, big and burly as he was, could not move a muscle.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RESCUE.

As soon as Marion saw her advantage she began screaming loudly for help. In that crowded rookery it did not seem possible that it could be long before some one would hear her.

Liz O'Connell stuck her head out of the inner door, which happened to be exactly behind her brother, and directly in the range of Marion's pistol.

"Another step, and I will fire!" cried Marion, firmly; then once more her voice rang out in a cry for assistance.

Terence O'Connell sat there like a beaten cur. His face was livid, and his eyes fairly bulging.

More than once he attempted to rise from his chair, but Marion's command to "sit down" was always obeyed instantly.

After moments of suspense, there came a heavy step on the stairs; then Marion distinctly heard the sound of crutches.

In an instant, Terence O'Connell fell in a heap to his knees and began begging Marion not to be too hard on him.

Liz O'Connell, on the contrary, stood crouching like a tiger. A moment's lowering of the weapon, and she would have been at Marion's throat. She was not half so much of a coward as her brutal brother.

Marion kept her eyes on her continuously, hardly glancing at the man, who now cried like a baby, as he heard the footsteps approaching.

"Quick! Help! Help!" was Marion's only answer to his prayers. "Break down the door and, oh, hurry, hurry!"

There were more steps in the dingy hall, and then a heavy hand was laid on the door.

"What's the matter here? Open the door!" cried a voice that Marion knew at once belonged to an officer.

"I can't open it! I am a prisoner!" cried Marion, clearly. "Break it in, sir, quick! I can't hold out much longer!"

There was a creaking of hinges and an awful crash. Then, not only one policeman, but three of the blue-coated giants, entered.

Liz O'Connell's nerve had deserted her now, and the picture was one that could not help exciting admiration.

There stood the beautiful young girl, with her pistol cocked and ready, while both the man and woman were on their knees before her.

Marion started to explain, but one of the officers stopped her.

"The kid has told us," he said, pointing to the cripple, who was right behind them. "He's a curious critter, that cripple is. He's give them dead away, after makin' believe to help 'em!"

Marion was glad to be relieved of her heavy weapon, and as one of the officers put it in his pocket she pointed to her bank-book.

"They tried to make me give them every penny I possess," she said, bitterly, "and to think that I came here on an errand of mercy!"

"That's the part the kid did not know," said the officer, staring. "He said they had got you here to get some small sum out of you."

"A small sum, indeed! It is two thousand dollars," said Marion, hotly. "They would have robbed me of every cent and then left me here a prisoner if I hadn't been quick enough to grab the pistol!"

The other officers were attending to their prisoners, but as they all went out together they glanced at Marion admiringly.

"Why did you do it, Danny?" asked Marion of the cripple, as he hobbled close beside her through the narrow hallway.

"I hated 'em, miss," he said, with a grin. "They've beat me often and 'twas my chance ter git square wid 'em!"

"And did you call the officers?" she asked him, curiously.

The strange child nodded and his eyes snapped brightly.

"I hs'ened 'til you hollered' an' then I run ter ther station house," he said, promptly. "Oh, I kin go like a good un when there's any one in danger!"

"You are a good boy. What is your name?" asked the young girl, sweetly.

"Danny Day," was the quick response. "I live with my sister. She's a saleslady in Howard & Howard's," he added, proudly.

Marion almost gasped, but there was no time to say more, for one of the officers was telling her that he should need her in court the next morning.

"I'll be there," said the girl as she watched her prisoners disappearing in the direction of the station house. "I'll send them to jail for years if I can. I'm not hard-hearted, but I do love justice."

"And they deserve it all right," said the officer, smiling at her, "for they are as big a pair of rogues as there are in the city."

When Marion reached home she was almost prostrated, but she knew it was her duty to see the Mertons immediately.

"Oh, Miss Marlowe, they have caught her!" cried Miss Merton, the minute she saw

her. "They've caught the shabby woman and arrested one of the culprits!"

Marion sank into a chair. She was too upset to speak, so Miss Merton made haste to tell her all that had happened.

No less than seven of the employees had been found guilty in that one day, for by the arrest of one, they unveiled the whole system.

Mrs. Sampson had made her last call at the store, and not only had she been sold some goods for which she paid only a third of the marked price, but other goods had actually been passed to her over the counters, for which she did not pay so much as a penny.

It was a case of rascality from beginning to end, these clerks all being actually in the employ of this woman.

When Miss Day was arrested she had wept and begged, pleading that she had to steal to support her crippled brother.

It was Marion's own discoveries that had clinched the whole case and fastened the guilt securely on the offending parties.

As for Bessie Ross, she, too, had met her fate that day, for she had been caught shoplifting in a neighboring store, and Howard & Howard's woman detective had helped to identify her.

As Miss Merton told her news her brother came in, and then Marion, in turn, told of her thrilling adventure.

Both her friends were horrified at the awful tale, and Mr. Merton went out at once to see what could be done for the wretched cripple.

The story which Marion had to tell Dr. Brookes had lengthened considerably before evening, but in his horror at her frightful experience he entirely neglected to tell his own, although Marion could see by his eyes that it would surely come in the near future.

At the court the next morning both Terence O'Connell and his sister received their just deserts. They were sent to jail for years, not only because of their plot against Marion, but because they were proven to be pick-pockets and all around sharpers, while the woman was one of Mrs. Sampson's gang of shop-lifters.

Howard & Howard's clerks were not tried for some time, but at last they, too, received their just share of punishment, and Miss Day, who seemed the ring-leader of the gang, was one of the first to be sent to prison.

Thus another thrilling episode in Marion's life had been passed. She had battled bravely for the right and won, as usual, through her own loyalty to truth and the cause of justice.

She only worked as private shopper for the balance of that week, for she had discovered that to do it justice she must neglect her lessons, and she was wise enough to know this would be an unwise proceeding.

One triumph had been hers that in her modesty she did not dream of, for in the short week of their acquaintance Mr. Tom Merton had lost his heart to her, and Dr. Brookes in the future would have a formidable rival.

Marion never saw Danny, the cripple, again after his sister was sent to prison, but she learned that he had been cared for by Messrs. Howard & Howard.

This fact was perhaps the brightest ray of sunshine in her path, for she had surely benefited and gladdened the future of one poor creature.

THE END.

Next week's My Queen (No. 10) will contain the story of one of Marion Marlowe's most dangerous experiences in the metropolis. It will be entitled, "Marion Marlowe's Triumph; or, In Spite of Her Enemies." Marion's engagement to appear as a star on the stage, followed by the jealousy she arouses in the hearts of her fellow actresses, leads to a series of thrilling climaxes which are bound to prove of absorbing interest.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BY GRACE SHIRLEY

NOTE.—This department is a special feature of this publication, and it will be appreciated, we feel sure, by all our readers. It is conducted by Miss Shirley, whose remarkable ability to answer all questions, no matter how delicate the import, has become well known. Readers of "MY QUEEN" need not hesitate to write her on any subject. Miss Shirley will have their interests at heart and will never refuse her assistance or sympathy. STREET & SMITH.

"I am a married woman, but we have no children. I feel the need of occupation badly, and am thinking of taking music lessons. My women friends have all made fun of the idea, and tell me I am too old, although I am only thirty-six. My husband, bless his heart, will let me do anything I want to, but I thought I would write and ask your advice. Do you think I am too old to begin such a study? MRS. JOSEPHINE K."

You are still quite a young woman, and must not think of growing old for many a long year. Study music by all means, if you have a taste for it. No one should fail to cultivate a taste for any of the arts if they have the means and the opportunity. Education should not end with marriage; the more you cultivate yourself the more attractive you will be to your husband. Do not concern yourself about the criticisms of your friends. Make the most of your opportunities and add to your accomplishments in every possible way.

"I have been engaged for two years, and expected to be married this winter. My fiance has just written me that he has lost his position and that he releases me from the engagement. I think just as much of him as I ever did, but since he has broken the engagement I am undecided as to what I ought to do. Shall I let it go as he says and consider that we are simply friends, or shall I insist upon its being continued? Please tell me, for I am awfully perplexed.

"GRACE W."

Your lover shows his manliness in offering you your freedom. He appreciates the fact that no man ought to ask a woman to marry him unless he is able to support her, and now that he is unable to provide for you he very properly cancels whatever hold he had upon your future.

Whether you will allow him to relinquish what he desires because of an embarrassment that will probably be only temporary is for you to decide. If your interest in him will not survive misfortune we advise you to cancel the engagement, for then you certainly do not care enough for him to marry him under any circumstances. If his trouble only makes you more sure that you care for him then we advise you to send for him to come and see you, and when he comes tell him that your love is not built upon the condition of his bank account or the ups and downs of business life, but on the more substantial basis of actual regard.

Encourage your lover in every possible way, and you will be a real help to him in his trials.

"I am only twenty years old, and have not yet seen any one that I really loved. I have liked some of the boys pretty well, but never liked any one of them so much that I thought I was in love with him. Now my parents want me to marry a man of forty-five, and I am half inclined to oblige them, as I have no other attachment. Do you think I would be happy with a man so much older than I am? I have no objection to him personally, but am quite indifferent. Do you think that marriage would make me love him?

"FANNIE H. H."

We doubt very much whether marriage ever made love grow unless there was some love before marriage. Unless a person is very congenial, it would be a decidedly doubtful experiment. When you are at the prime of womanhood your husband will be growing old, and it takes a good deal of true affection to make life pleasant and happy under those circumstances. Our advice would be not to marry anyway until you found the man whose society was a positive necessity to you. Indifference is a poor foundation for years of continual association. Better wait a while and see if you really have any affection for your suitor before you take the chance of ruining both your life and his.

"The gentleman to whom I am betrothed objects to my dancing with any one but himself at the balls and parties which we attend. I cannot see any harm myself in a waltz or polka with other friends, but he objects so decidedly that I thought I would write and ask you. Do you think there is any harm in it? ALICE S. B."

We think it would be very strange indeed if you were to confine all your dances to one partner. Your betrothed ought to be glad to have you enjoy yourself, and it is a very narrow minded man, indeed, who will object to another's enjoyment for selfish reasons. We would advise you to reason the matter out with him and endeavor to

make him realize that your talking and dancing with others has nothing whatever to do with your affection for him. It is very possible that there are better dancers than he, and there is no reason why you should not occasionally enjoy a dance with them.

Treat the discussion with perfect calmness and dignity, and do not allow his ideas to influence you against your own judgment. He will respect you more than ever if you insist upon what is right and reasonable.

"There are two young men who seek my hand in marriage. I like both of them well enough to marry them, but cannot decide which to take. One of them is quite handsome and engaging in manner. The other is not at all good looking, but he is awfully kind and thoughtful. I am sure that either of them would make a good husband, but cannot judge between them. Won't you please tell me which you would take if you were me? STELLA S. C."

We cannot answer your letter better than to quote from Shakespeare: "A straight back will stoop; a curved pate will grow bald; a fair face will wither; a full eye will wax hollow, but a good heart is the sun and the moon, or, rather, the sun, for it shines bright and never changes, but keeps his course truly." Good looks will make no one happy; kindness and thoughtfulness usually help one a long way toward happiness, if they do not create it.

Aside from this we do not think that you care enough for either of these men to think of marrying them. You may like them "well enough," but you certainly do not love either of them, and marriage without love is a very doubtful experiment.

"So many inquiries have received wise replies through the columns of 'My Queen' that I am going to ask you to give me the benefit of your opinion upon one that is a little out of the usual run. Do you think that women should be allowed to vote? MRS. B. L."

When we took charge of this department we did not anticipate that we would be called upon to decide upon the woman suffrage question, but we are willing to tell you what we think even if our thoughts and desires may have to wait many years for their fulfilment. In our opinion, the matter of suffrage is not yet properly restricted even as far as the male sex is concerned. The man who is ignorant, depraved and a pauper, has at present the same voice in the conduct of the affairs of this nation as the scholarly, high-minded property-owner whose interests are at the mercy of the rabble. A large number of the men who have the right of suffrage are absolutely undeserving of it, and we would be glad to see the privilege taken away from them and transferred to those women whose brains, education and character entitle them to a voice in national matters. The right of suffrage, however, carries with it certain duties, and we doubt whether many women would desire to assume those duties.

"I think Marion Marlowe is the sweetest girl I ever heard of, and Bert is just splendid! Are they going to get married some day? I think they ought to, for Bert certainly deserves her, and I would so enjoy reading about their wedding.
"SADIE H."

Marion has not revealed any tendency towards matrimony as yet, and we doubt whether she has any ambition in that direction. She wants to make her own way in the world and be the architect of her own future. Bert certainly deserves a good wife, and perhaps he will get one some day.

"I have come to you with my trouble because I could go nowhere else. My husband spends half his evenings away from home, and when I remonstrate with him, he only gets angry. I do all I can to make our home attractive, and I am at a loss to know what course to pursue. I am utterly miserable about it, and hope you can help me. Can't you suggest some way by which I can keep my husband home nights?
"MRS. A. S. B."

We would suggest, first of all, that you cease to "remonstrate." A home lined with remonstrances and roofed with complaints is attractive to no man. Make your home as bright and cheerful as you can. If a pleasant face and a sympathetic manner will not keep your husband home then let him go elsewhere, but never fail to make him realize that his own house is very attractive. If he still gives to others the time that you consider yours, then surround yourself evenings with pleasant, sociable friends and tell him next day what a pleasant evening you spent with them. Before long he will probably wonder whether he would not have had a better time if he had stayed home, and then you will have won your victory. A man frequently appreciates his home more because of an evening spent elsewhere, and an occasional change will not injure your husband or yourself.

"I am twenty-five years old and have not yet had a love affair. Almost all my girl friends are either engaged or married, and they make fun of me because I am an old maid. I am really made very uncomfortable sometimes, and wonder why I cannot find some man who will make me as happy as they seem to be. Do you think that there is anything wrong with my disposition that I cannot attract affection as the others do? Is it any disgrace, anyway, to be an old maid?
"MIRIAM C."

Do not let your friends' idle jests make you uncomfortable. Look about you at the many unhappy married couples and consider how much better off you are than they. Your disposition perhaps requires more of a man than your friends do, but when you find the right man he will be superior to those they have selected. It would not be a very serious matter if you never

found him. A self-sustaining, self-supporting "old maid" commands the respect of every one. A life of comparative loneliness is far better than a loveless marriage. Celibacy is an honorable and often a praiseworthy state. A marriage based upon mutual love and esteem may be the happiest calling for a woman, but it is quite possible for a woman to be both useful and happy when these joys of life have passed her by or been voluntarily surrendered.

"I am a little in doubt upon a certain subject, and as I am all alone in the world, I ask you to advise me, dear Miss Shirley. I go out a good deal—some of my escorts treat me with respect and some of them are— – well, not quite as nice as they should be. I spoke to one of them about his actions, and he told me that a girl who rode to and from an evening party in a closed carriage ought not to object if her escort did hug and kiss her. Please let me know what you think about this. FRANCES B. W."

We think that any escort who takes advantage of a closed carriage to thrust his attentions upon a young woman is a very poor escort for any girl to have, and we would advise that you do not go out with him again. The man that does not treat you with proper respect at all times does not value your society enough to deserve it. Circumstances should not be allowed to influence actions and the girl who allows them to is lacking in womanly dignity, and the man who tries to persuade her to do so is lacking in gentlemanliness and manhood. Do not go out with a man whom you cannot trust, and do not allow any man to induce you to lose one particle of your own self-respect.

"When two people love each other, should any one else be allowed to interfere? I am having a lot of trouble with my family because I have become engaged to a young man, and they object to my doing so because I am only sixteen years old. My betrothed is three years older than I am, and I think we are quite old enough to know our own minds. Don't you think that they ought to leave us alone? KITTIE T."

No, Kittie, we do not agree with you. Both you and the young man are too young to think of marriage for a long time yet. Wait until you have seen something of the world and of other men before you decide upon a partner for life.

Your family are perfectly right in endeavoring to dissuade you from taking any such step. When you are ten years older you might think of marriage, but boy and girl matches are seldom successes. Ask the young man to wait a few years for you, and then if your and his affection remains the same you can sensibly think of wedding.

"A friend of mine took me to the theatre last week and went out between every act. I spoke to him about it afterward, and he got quite angry and said I was unreasonable. I did not think it was very polite or respectful myself, but I know lots of men do it, so I thought I would write to you and ask your opinion. Please tell me what you think about it. VIRGINIA B. H."

We think that the young man showed small appreciation of your society, and we would not go out with him again.

There are few sights more annoying than the streams of men leaving the theatre during the intermissions. If he wants your society at all it ought to be quite as agreeable to him when the curtain is down as when it is up.

We have never been able to understand why so many women submitted to this sort of treatment tamely. If a man cannot live through the evening without a glass of liquor, he had better spend his time in a barroom instead of in a theatre. No man would think of doing such a thing during an evening call, and we fail to see why he should not be quite as polite at a place of amusement.

"I think a great deal of a young man whom I know, and at times I have thought he was not indifferent to me. Recently, however, he has been almost cold in his manner, and it has made me feel very badly. How can I make him realize that I care for him and win his affection?
"MARY A. G."

We would not advise you to try to make this young man realize that you care for him. Never waste a single heart throb upon one who does not appreciate it. A woman's whole capital is her love and affection, and when she pours out this rich treasure upon one who does not care for her she makes the gravest possible mistake.

You were probably lonely and imagined that this man cared for you when he did not. The almost universal desire for a heart mate leads women to put false interpretations upon the actions of any man with whom she is thrown in contact.

Save your love and your comradeship for those who seek it and will value it. Put this young man resolutely out of your thoughts and mind, and do not allow yourself to consider that he roused any soft interest in your heart.

"Please decide a question of etiquette for me. I am engaged, but my fiance and myself try to make ourselves agreeable to other people just the same. Now, can I properly accept the escort of another gentleman to a ball? My fiance seems to feel a little hurt at the idea, but he says he is willing that I should go with the other fellow if I think it is all right. If I do he will have to go alone and meet me there. Please answer this letter in the next issue of 'My Queen,' if you can, so I will know what to do. LETTIE H. P."

Your idea of making yourself agreeable to other people is a most sensible one, and we wish that more engaged couples had the same good sense.

In the case which you mention it seems to us that your fiance would be your proper escort. If you were married your husband would be, and

your betrothed stands in the same relative position now. It would be in better taste, we think, if you went to and from the ball with him and let the other man go alone. Make the evening as pleasant as you choose for other men when you are there, but do not allow any of them to feel that he is displacing the man to whom you are pledged.

"I began to read 'My Queen' at No. 4, and am so interested in Marion that I want to get the back numbers. None of the newsdealers that I have asked seem to have them. Please let me know whether they are out of print or where they can be obtained. JOSEPHINE G."

Newsdealers are often short-sighted in their business policy and fail to keep on hand any but the current issues of a publication, although they can procure all back numbers from their wholesalers. We will be glad to send you any back numbers that you desire. Just enclose the price in postage stamps and address your letter to Street & Smith, 238 William street, New York. You will receive the magazines by return mail.

"Please let me know whether it is proper for me to make a present to a young man on his birthday. We have been acquainted two years, and have been very good friends. He has sent me some little remembrance like flowers or candy on my birthdays and at Christmas, and I want to return his attention in some way. Some of my friends say that it would not be proper. What do you think about it? M. M. J."

If the young man will understand that you are simply showing him a friendly courtesy, we see no harm whatever in your making him a present. He will probably be very much pleased to find that you remembered him, and we cannot see where there would be any impropriety in your sending him a suitable gift. You cannot very well send him flowers or candy, but a pair of gloves or a necktie would be appreciated by any man.

Of course, we do not believe in a young woman spending much money on a young man, or deluging him with attention that is not returned, but a tasteful reminder of your mutual friendship would not be at all amiss.

"One of my friends has proved to be unfaithful, and I am, oh! so unhappy. I have been in love with a young man for some time, and I told my dearest friend what I thought of him. She has deliberately tried to attract him, and she has succeeded so well that I am broken-hearted. He seems perfectly happy with her, and seldom comes to see me now. I am utterly miserable. Can't you tell me of some way by which I can win him back? AMELIA B."

We are very sorry that you are so unhappy, but if the young man's nature is fickle, it is much better for you to discover that fact now than later on, when perhaps it would be too late.

There is no possible rule to follow in order to win another's love. Love goes where it will, not where it is coaxed or driven. If your friend succeeded in attracting this young man it was either because his nature is fickle or because he did not care for you truly and entirely. In either case, you are fortunate to have discovered the truth.

Do not try to win this man back. Cultivate the society of others, and see if you cannot find pleasure and happiness with them. Do not let any one suppose that you are "broken-hearted," but endeavor in every way to show the young man and your supposed friend that you can get along very well without their society.

"My fiance and myself are agreed upon all questions except that of religion, and as we find this a source of continual argument, I am doubtful whether we ought to marry. He is extremely orthodox, while I—— Well, I am an Atheist. He cannot seem to understand that I have looked into the subject at all deeply, and thinks that as I am to marry him, I ought to abandon my beliefs and accept his. I want to please him in all things, but I simply cannot believe what he asks. Now, what ought I to do—break the engagement or try to win him over to my way of thinking? BLANCHE W. W."

We advise you by all means to settle the matter of religion before marriage. There is no reason that we can see why you are not each entitled to your own belief. Your brain is as capable as your future husband's, and your opinions entitled to as much consideration as his.

You owe it to yourself and to your self-respect that he shall admit this. If you really love one another, neither religion, polities nor any other question will stand in the way very long.

If your lover wants to marry religion instead of a woman, let him look elsewhere. If he wants to marry the woman, let him take her with whatsoever belief she may have without endeavoring to convert her against her will.

"Can a working girl accept the attentions of a man of means without loss of self-respect? I met a gentleman some weeks ago whom I liked very much, and who has shown me considerable attention. The other girls in the boarding house where I live all say mean things about me, and hint that I am simply after the gentleman's money. In fact, they insinuate that I am not any better than I might be. Their talk has annoyed me so much that I am almost persuaded that I ought to give up his acquaintance. Won't you please let me have a word of advice?

"EFFIE W."

Do not allow the idle talk of others to influence you in what you know is right. Their insinuations against your character are probably prompted by jealousy. Because one man has more means than another it is no proof that he is not quite as sincere and honorable. If you enjoy his society and he enjoys yours there is no reason why you should drop his acquaintance. We would advise you to trace the gossip to its source, if you can, and to call the inventor of it to account. If you cannot do this, then ignore it entirely and go on in your own way with the serene conviction that you are right.

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